Dairy tradition rich in Appomattox

Dairy farming has been an important part of Appomattox County's agricultural community throughout the history of the county.

It is second only to forestry in dollar volume among the various types of agriculture in the county. According to the 1978 farm census, the dairy industry accounted for 34 percent of the county's agriculture-related revenue, a figure totaling $1.7 million.

There are two categories of dairymen in Appomattox County. Grade A dairymen sell their milk to be bottled for liquid consumption, and Grade B, or manufactured dairymen sell their milk for use in dairy products, such as cheese, butter, ice cream, condensed milk and powdered milk.

There are 15 Grade A dairymen in Appomattox County, and six manufactured dairymen.

Most of the Grade A dairymen in the county today started as manufactured dairymen 30 or more years ago.

The dairy business then was much different than it is today. Milking was done by hand, and the milk was stored in large milk cans which were brought to the frozen food locker in Appomattox next to J.E. Sears at the end of Main Stret.

Many of the older dairymen in the county remember the evening gatherings at the collection point, when trucks and wagons would come in from around the county, full of cans of fresh milk. Coble Dairy bought most of the milk produced in Appomattox.

In the early 1950s, the opportunity for marketing Grade A milk in the Norfolk area resulted in many of the local dairymen converting their farms to Grade A dairy operations. As the technology for producing feed crops and for increasing herd production improved, the size of the dairies and their output increased.

In 1968, Dairymen, Inc., a milk marketing cooperative association was formed in Richmond. Today the co-op, serving 17 states in the southeastern United States, is headquartered in Louisville, Ky. The co-op has 8,000 members, including 497 in the division that includes Appomattox County.

Jim Tate, a field representative for Dairymen, Inc., who serves the Appomattox area, notes that milk produced in Appomattox County is sold to Westover Dairy in Lynchburg, as well as dairy plants in Richmond, Norfolk, Bristol and Greensboro, N.C. "Where there's a market within reach, we will usually sell," notes Tate.

The dairy farm today is a picture of sanitation and modern technology. Grade A dairy cows are milked by electonic milking machines. The milk is stored in large stainless steel vats which are kept at a constant temperature, and the milk is agitated as it enters the vat to keep its texture consistent. The milk is picked up every two nights, and taken to processing plants where it is pasteurized and homogenized, then packaged for distribution to stores, schools, restaurants and other establishments which sell fresh milk.

A COW WATCHES OVER her newborn calf at the dairy farm of Dennis Torrence. The calf, which was born about an hour before this photo was taken, was having a bit of difficulty standing on all fours as her mother guarded her. Most dairy farmers in Appomattox keep only the female calves to be used as replacement animals. The bulls are usually sold three to five days after birth to be used as beef stock. A newborn calf may weigh more than 100 pounds, and from time to time the cow has trouble in delivery. The dairyman must be on hand when the cow begins to deliver in order to help her along in case of trouble.

Grade A milk

Dairying big business in state

According to figures compiled by the American Dairy Association of Virginia in 1964 there were 122,710 grade A dairy cows in Virginia and in 1982 there were 142,879.

While the number of cows has increased, the number of grade A dairy farms has decreased. In 1964 there were 2,466 grade A dairy farms in Virginia and in 1982 the number of grade A dairy farms had dropped to 1,722.

The number of gallons of milk per cow in 1964 was 1,182 and by the end of 1982 the number was 1,765. The average number of cows per farm had risen too, from 50 in 1964 to 83 in 1982.

In 1964 the investment per cow was approximately $1,800 and by 1982 it was $5,873.

Gross cash farm income from milk sales in 1964 was $66,696,000 and by the end of 1982 the figure had reached $285,000,000.

The top ranking dairy counties in the State of Virginia according to the number of grade A farms and cows are: Rockingham County with 299 grade A dairy farms and 20,562 dairy cows. Augusta is in second place with 128 grade A farms with 10,003 dairy cows. In third place is Franklin County with 126 grade A dairy farms and 9,938 dairy cows.

Milk is the official beverage of Virignia. Governor Charles Robb signed the act on April 1, 1982 that said, "Milk is hereby accepted, designated and adopted as the official beverage of the Commonwealth."

Milk is a bargain. It is economical, nutritious and a convenience food. Milk contains many of the nutrients needed in a nutritionally balanced diet and should be a very important ingredient in a weight control program.

Milk and other dairy foods provide 72% of the calcium in the American diet. Milk also contains a host of other essential ingredients.

U.S.D.A. statistics reveal that of the nutrients available in the U.S. food supply, milk and other dairy products provide the following:

- 39% of the riboflavin
- 33% of the phosphorus
- 20% of the magnesium
- 20% of the protein
- 18% of the Vitamin B12
- 12% of the Vitamin A
- 11% of the Vitamin B6

It is well to note, that while providing a wealth of nutrients milk and dairy foods contribute only 10% of the calories in the American diet according to facts released by the American Dairy Association of Virginia.

While "Old Bossie" is responsible for producing that fresh, satisfying beverage, milk, it is the careful handling of the dairy farm owners that keeps it fresh, pure, and safe for consumption.

Cows are milked twice a day with sanitary milking machines. The milk is pumped from a milking machine into a refrigerated farm tank. The milk is carefully checked before being pumped into the refrigerated tank truck. Each tank truck rushes cold milk from several farms to dairy plants.

Milk is processed and packaged in sterilized equipment; it is pasteurized in thermostatically controlled equipment and then most milk is homogenized.

Automatic milk machines package cold pasteurized milk in paper, glass, or plastic containers into cases. Conveyers rush the milk, ready for delivery, to a refrigerated room.

Milk is delivered to homes, supermarkets, schools, restaurants, hospitals, and other retail outlets in refrigerated trucks.

Manufactured dairymen's role important

There are five dairy operations in Appomattox County which produce manufactured milk.

Manufactured dairies, or, as they are more commonly known, "Grade B" dairies, sell their milk to be used for dairy products such as cheese, ice cream, powdered and condensed milk, and other items which require milk for manufacture.

Manufactured dairymen don't have as many regulations regarding their milk production as do Grade A dairymen.

For example, they can milk by hand, and the requirements for temporary storage facilities are not as stringent as those which regulate the Grade A dairyman.

The manufactured dairy milk is kept in cold storage until it is picked up by a delivery truck which visits the farm at three-day intervals. The milk produced by manufactured dairymen in Appomattox County is transported to a Carnation Dairy processing plant in Statesville,N.C. From there, it goes out to the consumer in a variety of forms ranging from butter to powdered milk.

For the most part, manufactured dairymen in Appomattox milk herds smaller than Grade A dairymen. The usual size of the milking herd here ranges from ten to 30 animals.

Richard Krantz, who milks one of the larger manufactured herds in the county, is currently milking 28 cows. He grows his own hay and silage, and buys his feed grain. Krantz uses automatic milkers, and does his own artificial insemination.

His wife Susie, does much of the herd milking while Richard is in Lynchburg at his regular job. He has been in the business three and a half years.

F. Carlton Harris, Jr., is another manufactured dairyman in Appomattox County. Carlton is currently milking 16 cows. He raises his own corn and a variety of types of hay to feed the cattle.

Ernest Harris, Keith Harris and Robert A. Smith are also manufactured dairymen in Appomattox County. The operations are all similar in nature, and all of the Grade B milk is sold to Carnation.

While the volume of milk produced by the manufactured dairymen is not as great as that produced by the Grade A dairies, the role of the manufactured dairyman in Appomattox County is nonetheless an important part of the overall dairying picture in the county.

AMERICAN FEDERAL . . .

. . . dedicated to preserving the tradition of the family farm. We salute the dairy farmers of Appomattox County!

As Dairymen, Inc.'s Jim Tate notes, "it takes a special type of person to farm, and a very special type of person to operate a dairy. Anytime you raise animals, it's a 365-day-a-year job. You have to be dedicated."